

Corpus Christi (A)

- I found that preparing a homily for *this* feast in *this* year very difficult.
- Yes, I can speak about a theology of the Eucharist quite easily, BUT, you are not here to celebrate it with me, & to speak about the spiritual nourishment that the Eucharist offers, & the moral imperatives it places upon us to BE the Body of Christ to the world seems a bit theoretical in the current context when you can't receive it.
- Over the last 3 months the entire world has been cast into a maelstrom that marks the beginnings of radical changes - & I am thinking especially of the 2 global catalysts – the Coronavirus pandemic & the death of George Floyd that has sparked racial protests around the world.
- In Australia more specifically, we could add for the Church the conclusion & recommendations of the Royal Commission into the Sexual Abuse of Children, & the current Plenary Council of the Australian Catholic Church that has called forth from Australian Catholics discerned reflections & challenges on the question of the very identity & purpose of the Church.
- With all these factors in play many would wish that everything settle, & we go back to some sort of peace & security.
- But one thing is sure – we cannot go back to the way things were before.
- But in the context of the Eucharist & this Feast of Corpus Christi, what does this mean?
- How does the current context of this storm of various events influence our understanding of the meaning, significance & purpose of the Eucharist?
- I have no answers because it is too early to read how all of these will influence our understanding, & there will be theologians reflecting on this as time goes on, but I have some thoughts that we can all take into consideration, & they come from the deeply heartfelt reflections of some of our parishioners.
- The current contexts impel us to re-evaluate what the Eucharist means to us.
- One person expressed with gratitude the opportunity we have at this time to understand more deeply what the Eucharist is when we can't receive it.
- I encountered a young woman from our parish with her children who admitted that they rarely go to Mass because of how busy they are on weekends, but the fact that currently they can't go, causes her a deep pain because the option to choose has been taken away from them.
- Another raised the question of what is happening to this Body of ours – the Eucharistic Body of Christ in the world?

- Another spoke of the isolation she's experiencing because she misses the community she gathers with on a Sunday, that for her is a fundamental part of her receiving the Eucharist.
- Several people have expressed their deep pain in not being able to receive the Eucharist as the spiritual sustenance that they've come to depend on.
- Yet several have said that if they were now able to go back to Mass, they wouldn't as long as there are restrictions of numbers able to attend, & for a number of reasons: a) they consider it fundamentally un-eucharistic to exclude anyone, or b) they wouldn't want to take the place of someone more in need than themselves, or c) even though their desire for the Eucharist is great, they, or their families, are concerned for their health & well-being until they can be reasonable assured that they won't contract or pass on the virus.
- Still others are experiencing this hunger for the Eucharist so deeply that they will use every opportunity to go anywhere to a celebration of the Mass.
- This all raises the question for me – what do we do, & how can we live as a Eucharistic people in a Eucharistic famine?
- What are the sources of spiritual sustenance we can use to feed upon when we can't celebrate the Eucharist freely together?
- You have to answer that question for yourself, because the challenge is now upon you to seek out that nourishment.
- Further, wider questions arise for us from the Plenary about the Eucharist, but one I want to briefly focus on is its general availability.
- If the Eucharist is so basic for us as Catholics, what do we do about the effects of the decreasing number of priests – those currently able to lead its celebration?
- Many people around the world are not able to celebrate or receive the Eucharist regularly because there is no one to preside.
- How do we deal with this in the future?
- Interestingly, from the time of the First Fleet's arrival in Australia in 1788, the Mass was not celebrated for the multitude of Catholics until the appointment of the first priest in 1820.
- The beginnings of Australian Catholic history were without the celebration of the Eucharist.
- But let's consider those for whom the Eucharist can be accessible & do not make use of the opportunity – what do we do to enable them to appreciate its value & show that people's hunger for meaning can be addressed by the promise Jesus makes in today's Gospel – that HE is the bread of life – who can quench our thirst for meaning in life.

- The challenge for all of us is to be converted to a different & better way of being the Body of Christ.
- This is a time of possibilities for transformation.
- In relation to the racial protests, a serious challenge is posed for all of us as Body of Christ.
- Jesus broke down barriers in his life & ministry between the rich & the poor, between men & women, between races & religions, between young & old.
- The Eucharist he imparts to us is the sacrament of unity.
- In whatever ways we are not faithful to sharing our bread with the poor; freeing those who are discriminated against for any reason; offering hospitality to those who have no nation to call their home, or no dignified home to live in, we are not faithful to the moral imperative that is part of being a Eucharistic people – the Body of Christ to the world – Now.
- So, how can these stormy times challenge & transform us into a people who can be more good, more unifying & more loving?